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SUBJECT: GOC REACHES OUT TO FARC, BUT WILL CONTINUE
MILITARY PRESSURE ON GROUP

REF: BOGOTA 2506

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Peace Commissioner Restrepo told us the GOC has reached out to establish direct contact with the FARC, but does not feel any pressure to move quickly on a peace process. The GOC believes Cano is isolated from other Secretariat members, and will continue military efforts to kill or capture him. Restrepo said the GOC must force Cano to understand that negotiations offer the only way out for the FARC (and for him); the GOC is prepared to provide Cano and other FARC leaders a "dignified" exit. Despite ruling out further international facilitation, Restrepo said the GOC could consider an international accompaniment or verification role once a serious process begins. The GOC remains willing to talk with the ELN, but sees little prospect as long as ELN leaders reside in Venezuela. End summary.

FARC REJECTS GOC TALKS--SUGGESTS NICARAGUA

2. (U) The FARC Secretariat issued a letter June 26 that stated the group would not directly negotiate with the GOC, and instead wanted a meeting with Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega to discuss "issues of war and peace." The letter, addressed to Ortega, thanked "Commandante Daniel" for his "support through these difficult moments" and for providing asylum to two FARC fighters brought to Nicaragua after the March 1 attack against FARC number two Raul Reyes in Ecuador. In a July 5 communique, the Secretariat admitted that the GOC's July 2 rescue of 15 hostages was a "reversal," but insisted the group would continue its fight. The Secretariat reiterated its interest in a humanitarian exchange of "political" hostages for FARC members captured by the GOC, but did not mention its long-standing demand that talks on such an exchange be conditioned on the GOC's demilitarization of Pradera and Florida municipalities.

GOC REMAINS READY TO TALK

3. (C) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told us July 11 that the GOC remains committed to pursuing direct talks with the FARC and has reached out to FARC leader Alfonso Cano (reftel). If the FARC responds positively to the GOC overture, the GOC will send an emissary to lay the groundwork for an eventual FARC-Restrepo meeting. The GOC would not insist on a FARC release of hostages as condition for talks,

because the GOC knows the FARC would not accept this. Still, Restrepo said the GOC does not feel any need to move quickly on talks with the group. Instead, it will try to establish contact and allow Cano to analyze his deteriorating situation. Restrepo stressed that the GOC will continue military operations to kill or capture Cano. The GOC needs to force Cano to understand that talks are the FARC's (and his) only way out.

INTERNAL FARC PROBLEMS AS OBSTACLE

¶4. (C) Restrepo said Cano remains isolated, and has little support from, or contact with, other members of the Secretariat. The isolation creates opportunities that the GOC may be able to exploit, especially if military pressure can further break FARC command and control systems. The GOC is prepared to offer Cano and other FARC leaders a "dignified" way out of the armed struggle, but does not want to fall into the trap of allowing the FARC to use peace talks to rebuild its military capacity. Restrepo said a major obstacle to a successful peace process is Cano's continued commitment to a "Leninist" approach to politics.

GOC: POSSIBLE FUTURE ROLES FOR INTERMEDIARIES

¶5. (C) The GOC does not need or want international or domestic facilitators with the FARC, but has not ruled out a future international "accompaniment" or verification role if the FARC begins to negotiate in good faith. Restrepo said that Operation "Checkmate" freed the GOC from French and U.S. pressure to advance on an humanitarian accord. He added that Alvaro Leyva, Carlos Lozano, Frenchman Noel Saenz, and Swiss

BOGOTA 00002578 002 OF 002

Jean Pierre Gontard had not been reliable facilitators.

¶6. (C) Restrepo said the French accepted the GOC 's revocation of their facilitation role with more grace than the Swiss, who insisted on continued engagement. On June 15, Prosecutor General Mario Iguaran announced an investigation against Gontard for allegedly carrying \$500,000 in cash for the FARC. The Swiss Foreign Ministry issued a press release on July 14 denying the charges and calling on the GOC to "cease its attacks" against Gontard.

GOC: ELN INCAPABLE OF TAKING DECISION ON PEACE

¶7. (C) Vice Minister of Defense Sergio Jaramillo told us a successful peace process with the ELN remains impossible, because ELN leaders lack the capacity to take decisions and do not control the group's armed fronts. The ELN remains weak militarily, but some fronts in Arauca, Cauca, and Narino have strengthened due to their heavy involvement in narcotrafficking. Jaramillo said the ELN is better than the FARC at political organizing, but added that its leaders do not have a vision of what role they might play in a democratic Colombia.

¶8. (C) Restrepo said key ELN leaders view Colombian realities through a Venezuelan lens and therefore feel little pressure to move on peace. Moreover, they will not enter into a peace process that is not linked to the FARC. Restrepo said ELN fronts cooperate with the FARC on narcotrafficking in some areas, and maintain a political profile in Arauca, Catatumbo, Narino, and southern Choco due to narcotrafficking. ELN leaders continue to pursue their old strategy of seeking contact with civil society and the international community instead of with the GOC. Still, Restrepo said the GOC would meet with the ELN if an opportunity presented itself--a scenario which would likely only occur if ELN leaders were forced to leave Venezuela.

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